

Credit to the future

Utah students entering college with academic classes compete to beat the rush

Mon, Oct 11, 2004

By TANNA BARRY

Standard-Examiner Davis Bureau

tbarry@standard.net



WHITNEY CURTIS/Standard-Examiner

Northridge High School junior Hal Mecham (left) and senior Tyler Hardy fix the alignment on a truck during their Auto III class Thursday at Northridge High in Layton.

An increasing number of students are putting a dent in their college graduation requirements, some earning associate's degrees before they've even graduated high school.

Statewide almost 22,000 students earned roughly 147,000 semester hours of college credit through concurrent enrollment classes, which allow students to earn both high school and college credit by taking specific courses.

That number has risen well above what it was in the 1995-1996 school year when about 12,000 students earned roughly 117,000 credits on the quarter system.

Statewide concurrent enrollment totals			
Year	State funding	Student participation	Credit hours*
1995-96	\$2,444,856	11,725	117,438 quarter hours
1996-97	\$2,761,591	13,691	157,928 quarter hours
1997-98	\$4,945,041	18,033	167,170 quarter hours
1998-99	\$5,360,898	19,744	127,693.5 semester hours
1999-00	\$4,701,173	20,506	126,986 semester hours
2000-2001	\$5,610,838	19,822	125,746.5 semester hours
2001-2002	\$6,149,390	20,663	133,746.5 semester hours
2002-2003	\$5,310,029	21,875	146,916.5 semester hours
*The number of credit hours earned generate funds to be used in the following year.			
Source: State Office of Education			
Standard-Examiner			

Funding for classes varies each year depending on the amount of credits students earned the previous academic year.

George Miller, a distance learning training specialist with the state Office of Education, said the numbers really started increasing in the 1998-1999 school year when the state provided almost \$5 million in funds for such classes.

"Students want to take these classes," Miller said. "They want to be better prepared in life and have more opportunities."

District credits		
School year district totals for credit hours earned*		
	2001-02	2002-03
Weber	6,525	6,814
Ogden	773	1,700
Davis	8,779	10,256
Morgan	1,023	1,102
Box Elder	3,096	3,391
*The number earned is just on-site high school courses		
Source: State Office of Education		
Standard-Examiner		

He thinks it can be a good option for capable students to get college credit for free since funding is provided in whole by the state Legislature.

"It's not suitable for every student," he noted. "Some don't like the extra pressure."

Enrolling in a concurrent enrollment class means starting the college transcript before a student leaves high school. If students do poorly in a course, it will bring down their college grade point average before they even apply to a university.

Advocates say it can be rewarding for a student who is ready for such a challenge.

"It makes their high school experience more meaningful, and it reduces the time and money they need for their college experience," said Mary Lou Seammons, Davis School District's career and technical education director. "These aren't wasted credits they're earning."

Jon Poll, a 17-year-old senior at Northridge High School, will have earned more than 15 college credit hours by the time he graduates. The credits range from specific subject credits in engineering to general education classes like music and English.

Saves money

"It's college credit, and it saves you money," Poll said, noting the engineering credits will allow him to move to higher level courses when he starts studying engineering and architecture in college. "It gets a lot of hassle out of the way."

With tuition rising each year, attending for free is a cost-saving measure. Weber State University's tuition was \$1,461 per year in 1995-1996 for an in-state tuition, but grew about 60 percent to \$2,344 by 2004-2005.

The only disadvantages Poll sees to concurrent enrollment classes is they aren't as challenging as real college courses or even advanced placement courses.

"In AP you have to know the subject to get credit," he said, noting credit all depends on the end-of-year test. "You have to keep up grades, but the grade doesn't determine your credit."

Holly Handy, Northridge's career and technical education coordinator, said all courses are a step above regular high school classes, and should be perceived as valuable as AP.

Look ahead

"It gets students looking beyond high school," Handy said. "They think about what they want to do."

Northridge High School offers 43 different concurrent enrollment classes, including five general education ones.

All coursework has to be aligned with what is taught at the college level and approved by the sponsoring university for credit at that institution. Weber State University works primarily with Ogden, Weber, Morgan and Davis districts.

Last year, they had classes at more than 35 high schools with 7,000 students enrolled in classes generating 19,968 credit hours and taught by 262 high school teachers.

Credit is transferable to any public institution of higher education.

Dianne Siegfried, WSU's concurrent enrollment program administrator, said the program better prepares students for college-level work as they learn things like study and test-taking skills.

"You're receiving college-approved content that is to prepare a student for the successful transition to the next higher course when they arrive at universities," she said.

Strict guidelines

Having strict program requirements like students having to maintain a B average and 90 percent attendance rate in concurrent classes ensures only students who are ready take the classes enroll, Siegfried said.

Kathleen Chronister, now an assistant principal at Mountain High School who used to work as Davis' standards and credit specialist, said the interest and courses have grown mostly in the past three years.

Davis students earned 8,779 credits in the 2001-2002 school year while Weber earned 6,525 and Ogden 773. Those numbers increased to 10,256 for Davis students in 2002-2003, 6,814 for Weber and 1,700 for Ogden.

"Students are seeing the opportunity for how they can move quickly into college-level courses that challenge them," she said. "These aren't just random courses in very specific subject areas either."

Though there are specialized courses for credit such as in automotive technology, students can also earn general education credit for courses such as English and even math depending on each district's offerings.

Expand math offering

Davis District wants to focus more on general education requirements. Davis High School is piloting a program where students can earn math credit in 1010 and 1050. Eventually, the district hopes to move this course so that it is offered at every high school.

"It's nice to have both the focused courses and have general education to get it out of the way," Chronister said.

Davis leaders say this chance is one that comes at the expense of teachers who aren't paid more for teaching college-level courses. In fact, Chronister said it requires more effort from teachers as they have to have their curriculum approved by the college and sometimes even have to take the related college-level course before teaching students.

"They are in this to help the kids," Chronister said, noting that the university partner also charges less to the district so the state money goes further.

Worth it

Northridge engineering teacher Heather Hill said any extra effort is worth it for the students.

Miller thinks interest will continue to grow even as the state Board of Education considers five minor rule changes that could be approved as soon as November.

Such rules include only allowing public universities to partner with high schools to offer classes, and all agreements to be in a formal contract between the university and the district. Another change is high school students would be limited to only earning 30 college semester hours a year because of the limited amount of funding available.

"We want to make sure it's equal access to all students," Miller explained. "We want to spread the state tax dollars more equitably."

District officials say it will continue to be a great program for students. Tyler Hardy, a 17-year-old senior at Northridge, agrees, saying it gave him a headstart in his future career choice.

He wants to be an auto mechanic and has been able to earn about six credits for college.

Copyright ©2004, Ogden Publishing Corporation

ARTICLE RETRIEVED OCTOBER 14, 2004

To find this article on the Internet, Go to the Ogden Standard Examiner--Archives. You will have to register to log on, but it is free.

http://www.standard.net/search_archive.html